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RAICHT ★ HOWARD ★ DANIEL ★ HARRISON

WILD BLUE YONDER

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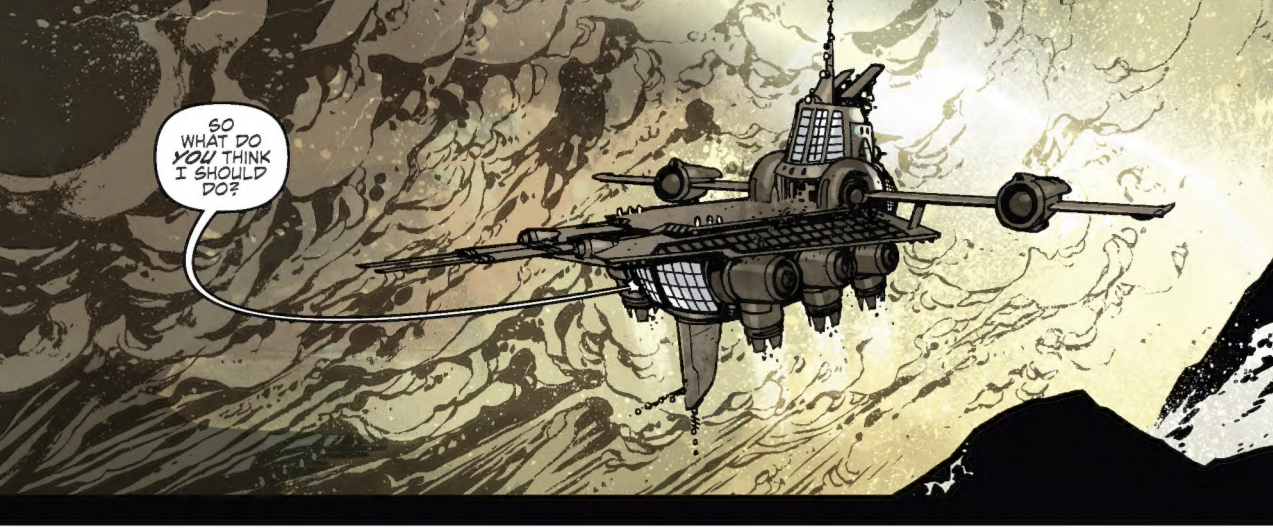
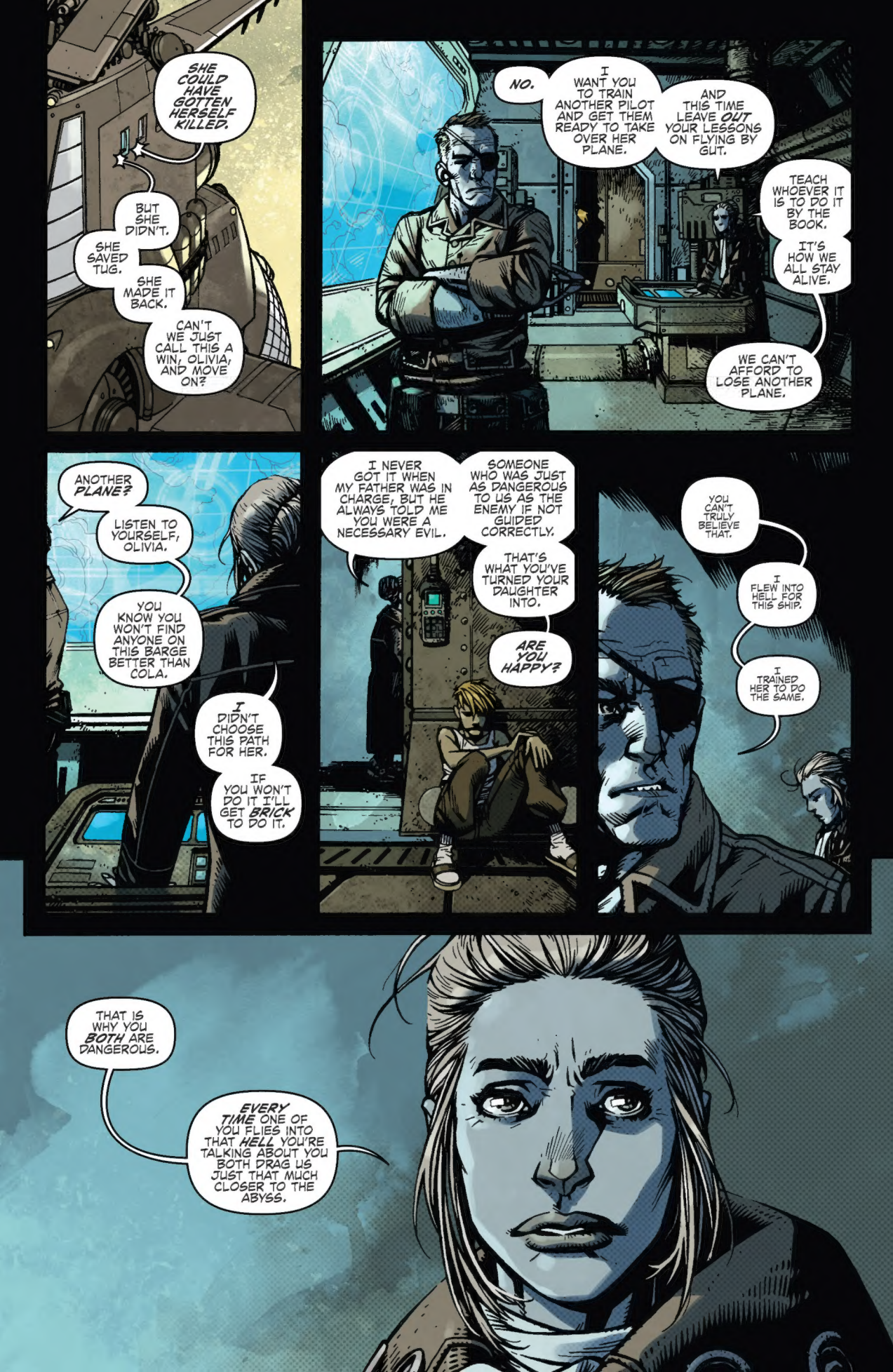
JUDGE, YOU WERE RIGHT. THIS OUTPOST IS LONG DORMANT.
HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL NO SIGN OF *THE DAWN.*
SOME OF THE FLEET COMMANDERS ARE CONCERNED.
WE ARE WAITING IN AMBUSH, LODGE.
WHAT COULD BE WORRYING THEM?
THERE IS NOT ENOUGH ROOM FOR ALL OF THE BARGES TO LAND.
WE *COULD* ALWAYS REFUEL THEM.
OUR FUEL BARGE IS STILL FLYING HEAVY AND FULL.
THE RESERVES ARE--
NOT TO BE TOUCHED.
WE MUST CONSERVE ALL WE CAN.
WE MAY NEED IT.
OF COURSE. I ALSO HAVE OUR INITIAL BOARDING TEAMS AND ESCORTS GEARING UP.
ENGINEERS AND PILOTS ARE READY TO TAKE COMMAND OF THE VESSEL IN THE SECOND WAVE.
SPARE NO ONE.
THE DAWN'S CREW IS RESILIENT.
SIR? WHAT IF THE SHIP DOES NOT SHOW?
THIS MOUNTAIN GAP IS WHERE I WOULD RUN.
THE HOPE OF CLEAR SKIES AND LOSING ANY PURSUERS IS TOO BIG A LURE.
HOWEVER, TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, IF SHE DOES NOT SHOW, WE WILL HAVE *LARGER* CONCERNS.
THAT WILL BE ALL, LODGE.
DR. STEPHENS.
LODGE.

SARAH, WELCOME.
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME FOOD?
THANK YOU.
I'VE NEVER SEEN THE FLEET DOCK ANYWHERE LIKE THIS.
IS EVERYTHING OK?
YES. WE'RE WAITING FOR A SHIP. THE DAWN.
THE FOREVER SHIP?
NEVER REFUELS. ALWAYS IN THE SKY.
I THOUGHT IT WAS A MYTH.
SHE EXISTS.
I FOUGHT A BATTLE FOR HER LONG AGO WHEN I WAS A PILOT.
MUCH SIMPLER TIMES.
YOU THINK TAKING THE DAWN WILL SAVE US?
NO.
NOTHING CAN SAVE US ALL.
I DON'T CARE ABOUT MY LIFE.
I ONLY CARE FOR THE INNOCENTS IN THIS WAR YOU KEEP WAGING.
WHAT ABOUT THOSE ABOARD THE DAWN?
DO ANY OF THEM MEET YOUR STANDARDS?
I HAVE A SPY ON BOARD.
HE WILL POINT OUT THOSE WHO CAN HELP US RUN THE SHIP.
WE ARE DOING WHAT WE MUST TO SAVE THE BODY.
YOU UNDERSTAND THAT.

PRIMUM NON NOCERE.
"DO NO HARM."
THAT IS A NOBLE SENTIMENT.
AND ONE I'VE HEARD BEFORE. NOW IS NOT THE TIME.
WHAT MAKES *US* SO SPECIAL? WHY ARE WE CHOSEN?
BEFORE THE EARTH WAS SCORCHED, THE WORLD WAS A GENTLER PLACE FILLED WITH RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY AND SENTIMENTALITY.
AND DOCTORS WHO *COULD CHOOSE* TO DO NO HARM.
THOSE CHOICES DON'T EXIST OUT THERE ANYMORE. AT LEAST NOT FOR ME.
NOW IT IS ONLY *SURVIVE* OR *DIE* AND, EVENTUALLY, THERE WON'T EVEN BE THAT.
I WILL NOT SPEAK TO THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE ME BUT SENTIMENTALITY HAS NOT ONCE ENTERED INTO ANY DECISIONS I'VE MADE.
THIS GREAT SOCIETY WE'VE BUILT IS A HERDING GROUND FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.
IT IS MY GOAL TO ENSURE ONLY THE *ELITE* WILL STEP FOOT ON THE DAWN.
AND ONCE THIS FLEET HAS EXHAUSTED OUR FUEL SUPPLY AND CRASHED TO THE EARTH, THE DAWN, WITH OUR CHOSEN ENVOYS OF HUMANITY ON IT, WILL LEAVE THIS EXTINCT WAY OF LIFE BEHIND.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, JUDGE?
AREN'T YOU GOING TO BE ON THE DAWN LEADING THIS GLORIOUS NEW AGE?
NO.
I WILL *GLADLY* WATCH IT LEAVE ME BEHIND.
MY DUTY WILL BE DONE, SARAH.
ON THAT DAY, I REST.



CHAPTER FOUR


SHE COULD HAVE GOTTEN HERSELF KILLED.
BUT SHE DIDN'T.
SHE SAVED TUG.
SHE MADE IT BACK.
CAN'T WE JUST CALL THIS A WIN, OLIVIA, AND MOVE ON?
NO.
I WANT YOU TO TRAIN ANOTHER PILOT AND GET THEM READY TO TAKE OVER HER PLANE.
AND THIS TIME LEAVE OUT YOUR LESSONS ON FLYING BY GUT.
TEACH WHOEVER IT IS TO DO IT BY THE BOOK.
IT'S HOW WE ALL STAY ALIVE.
WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE ANOTHER PLANE.
ANOTHER PLANE?
LISTEN TO YOURSELF, OLIVIA.
YOU KNOW YOU WON'T FIND ANYONE ON THIS BARGE BETTER THAN COLA.
I DIDN'T CHOOSE THIS PATH FOR HER.
IF YOU WON'T DO IT, I'LL GET BRICK TO DO IT.
I NEVER GOT IT WHEN MY FATHER WAS IN CHARGE, BUT HE ALWAYS TOLD ME YOU WERE A NECESSARY EVIL.
SOMEONE WHO WAS JUST AS DANGEROUS TO US AS THE ENEMY IF NOT GUIDED CORRECTLY.
THAT'S WHAT YOU'VE TURNED YOUR DAUGHTER INTO.
ARE YOU HAPPY?
YOU CAN'T TRULY BELIEVE THAT.
I FLEW INTO HELL FOR THIS SHIP.
I TRAINED HER TO DO THE SAME.
THAT IS WHY YOU BOTH ARE DANGEROUS.
EVERY TIME ONE OF YOU FLIES INTO THAT HELL YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT YOU BOTH DRAG US JUST THAT MUCH CLOSER TO THE ABYSS.

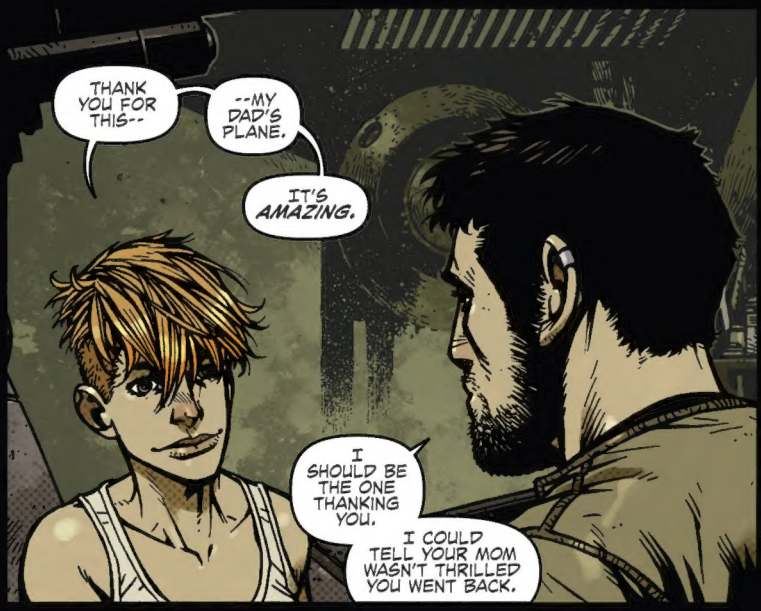
"WE DON'T NEED HER TO RIDE ON THE EDGE LIKE THAT."
"WE NEED HER TO STAY THE COURSE AND KEEP US ALL ALIVE BY DOING THE RIGHT THING."
"THERE ARE NO HEROES OUT THERE."
"NOT ANYMORE."
"I NEED SOMEONE I CAN COUNT ON."
"IT'S TIME SHE GREW UP."
AND THERE WE GO.
PERFECTION.
TUG, WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
BONK!
OH GOSH. I'M SO SORRY.
OWOWOW.
I'D BELIEVE IT A BIT MORE IF YOU WEREN'T LAUGHING.
I WANTED TO FIX IT.
I THOUGHT I COULD, MAYBE.
I MISS WORKING ON STUFF LIKE THIS.
IT'S LIKE NEW.

NOT QUITE.
SHE'LL FLY.
PROBABLY EVEN SPIT A LITTLE LEAD, BUT I DON'T THINK SHE'S AS FAST AS YOUR PLANE.
WHAT'S THAT FOR?
IT'S FOR YOUR DAD.
SO HE CAN FLY IT.

NOT BAD FOR A MINER...
...BET YOU HAVE A LOT OF YOUR DAD IN YOU, DON'T YOU?
YEAH. I GUESS.

AND TEXAS HELPED.
HE'S A SMART KID.
HE FOLLOWS ME IN HERE EVERY NIGHT.
YEAH. HE LOOKS LIKE HE WAS A BIG HELP.

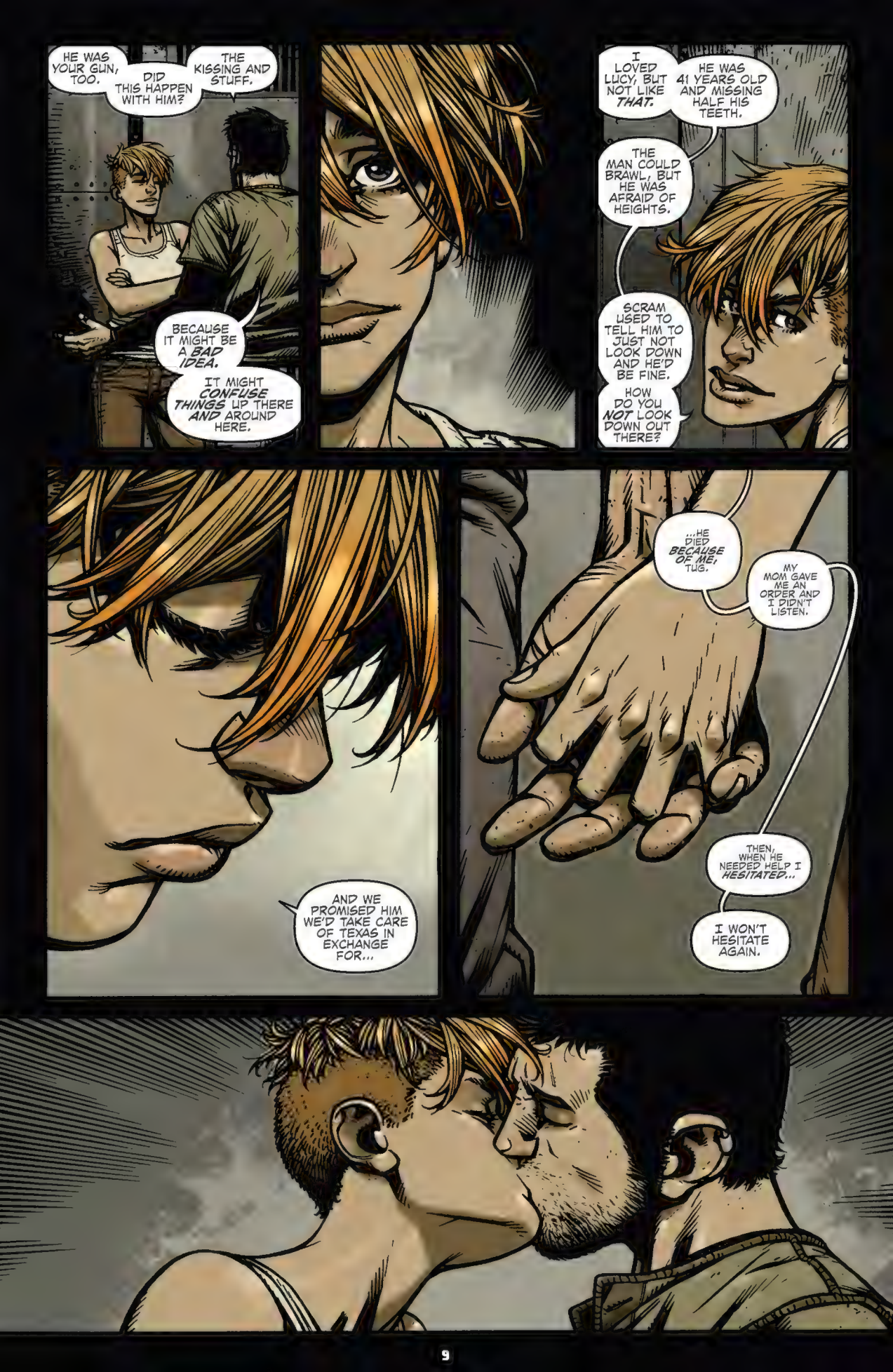
HAS YOUR MOM COOLED DOWN?
NOT REALLY. SHE'S STILL ANGRY.


THANK YOU FOR THIS--
--MY DAD'S PLANE.
IT'S AMAZING.
I SHOULD BE THE ONE THANKING YOU.
I COULD TELL YOUR MOM WASN'T THRILLED YOU WENT BACK.

SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO RELY ON EACH OTHER.
TO LIVE OR DIE BASED ON A SPLIT-SECOND DECISION YOU DON'T EVEN REALIZE YOU'RE MAKING.
I GET THAT, BUT YOUR MOM'S RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING. THE DAWN CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE YOU.
YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT ME. I'M EXPENDABLE.

I WON'T THINK THAT WAY. EVER.

WAIT.
WHAT'S WRONG?
THIS SHOULDN'T HAPPEN AGAIN.
I...YOU DON'T KNOW ME VERY WELL.
GEEZ, HAVE YOU AND MY MOM BEEN TALKING?
NO... NO! IT'S JUST I'M NOT SCRAM.
I'M GOING TO DIE OUT THERE.
YEAH.
WE ALL COULD. BUT THIS IS OUR LIFE.
WE CAN'T STOP LIVING OR WHAT'S THE POINT?
DID YOU FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT LUCY?
LUCY?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?


HE WAS YOUR GUN, TOO.
DID THIS HAPPEN WITH HIM?
THE KISSING AND STUFF.
BECAUSE IT MIGHT BE A BAD IDEA.
IT MIGHT CONFUSE THINGS UP THERE AND AROUND HERE.
I LOVED LUCY, BUT NOT LIKE THAT.
HE WAS 41 YEARS OLD AND MISSING HALF HIS TEETH.
THE MAN COULD BRAWL, BUT HE WAS AFRAID OF HEIGHTS.
SCRAM USED TO TELL HIM TO JUST NOT LOOK DOWN AND HE'D BE FINE.
HOW DO YOU NOT LOOK DOWN OUT THERE?
AND WE PROMISED HIM WE'D TAKE CARE OF TEXAS IN EXCHANGE FOR...
...HE DIED BECAUSE OF ME, TUG.
MY MOM GAVE ME AN ORDER AND I DIDN'T LISTEN.
THEN, WHEN HE NEEDED HELP I HESITATED...
I WON'T HESITATE AGAIN.

TAP!
TAP!
TAP!
TAP!
TAP!
TAP!
COME ON, RESPOND.
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
TUG?
TEXAS TOLD ME YOU BOTH HAD SOMETHING TO SHOW ME.
WHAT IN THE HELL ARE YOU DOING THERE, SON?
UUF.
SMASH!

JUDGE, WE RECEIVED A TRANSMISSION FROM OUR AGENT ABOARD THE DAWN.
WHAT DID IT SAY?
TELL HIM.
THE MESSAGE READS, "COURSE HEADING CORRECTION. 123 DEGREES SOUTH AND--" THEN IT STOPPED.
WHERE DID YOU RECEIVE THIS FROM?
IT WAS A DIRECT TRANSMISSION. NO REDIRECT FROM ANY OF OUR COMM BASES.
THEY ARE CLOSE.
THEN THEY ARE HEADING THIS WAY.

BRICK, STOP.
HE SOLD US OUT, COLA.
YOU HEARD HIM!
HE'S WORKING FOR THE JUDGE!
HE'S KILLED US.
WE'RE NOT DEAD YET, BRICK.
COOL IT.

I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING I KNOW, BUT YOU HAVE TO CHANGE COURSE.
PLEASE.
THEY KNOW YOUR COORDINATES AND HEADING.
WE CAN'T CHANGE COURSE RIGHT NOW.
WE'RE IN THE SLOT.
TOO MUCH ONE WAY AND WE'LL HIT THE MOUNTAIN.
THE OTHER SIDE HAS A POTENT RAD CLOUD THAT WOULD KILL US ALL EVENTUALLY.
BUT YOU PROBABLY KNOW THAT DON'T YOU?
I DIDN'T.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO REACH THEM.
TRYING TO THROW THEM OFF OUR--
OUR?
THAT'S RICH.
WHY ARE WE LISTENING TO THIS?
HE WAS BUILDING A PLANE TO ESCAPE.
NO. THAT'S NOT TRUE. THAT WAS FOR BIG COLA.
I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO FLY. I'M JUST AN ENGINEER.
AND ALL THIS TIME WE THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST SOME POOR MINER.

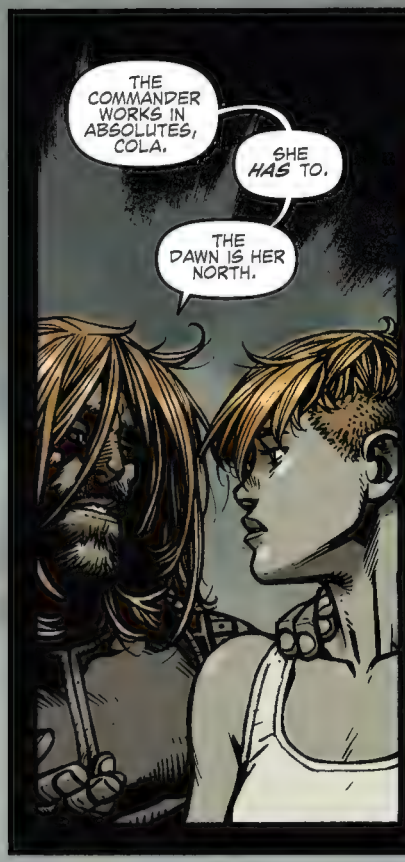
YOU'RE RIGHT.
I LIED.
I'M SORRY.
I DIDN'T TELL YOU EVERY-THING.
BUT AFTER I GOT HERE, I STARTED TO...
...I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT ANY OF YOU.
THE JUDGE TOLD A GROUP OF US HIS FUEL SUPPLIES ARE RUNNING DRY.
HE NEEDED THE DAWN TO ENSURE THE FLEET'S SURVIVAL.
WE WERE SENT OUT TO TRY TO FIND YOU.
WHAT'S THEIR PLAN, TUG?
THEY WANT TO BOARD.
I WAS TO POINT OUT ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL TO THE BOARDING PARTY TO MAKE SURE THEY DIDN'T GET HURT.
THE REST...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
I'M SO SORRY.
COLA, PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU WAIT OUTSIDE.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE, DAMMIT!
GO!

WAIT, I WAS TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING.
JUST LIKE ALL OF YOU.
THEY WERE MY FAMILY.
WELL, MY FAMILY DOESN'T HUNT DOWN AND KILL EVERYTHING IN THE SKY.
YOU THINK I DON'T SEE HOW MESSED UP THIS IS?
THEY JUST WANT TO SURVIVE. LIKE YOU.
THE JUDGE TOOK ME IN AFTER MY DAD DIED.
I DIDN'T KNOW WHO YOU WERE.
I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.
WHAT DID YOU EXPECT TO FIND HERE?
I DON'T KNOW BUT...
...I NEVER EXPECTED TO FIND ANYONE LIKE YOU.
I'VE HEARD ENOUGH.
MOM!
STOP HIM!

BOOM!
NO.
ENOUGH!
EVERYONE OUT.
NOW!
COLA, I WANTED TO TELL YOU SO MANY TIMES.
BUT I KNEW IF I DID YOU'D HATE ME.
YOU'D HAVE TO.
SO, I THOUGHT I COULD THROW THEM OFF OUR TRAIL WITHOUT ANYONE KNOWING WITH FAKE COORDINATES.
I WANTED TO BE WITH ALL OF YOU.
BUT IT'S TOO LATE FOR ME.
I KNOW THAT NOW.

WE NEED TO KILL HIM. YOU BOTH KNOW THAT. LET ME--
BRICK, THE ONLY THING I NEED YOU TO DO IS PREP THE PLANES.
YES, MA'AM.
BC, PREPARE EVERYONE FOR THE WORST.
GET THE CHILDREN TO THE SAFE ROOM.
OF COURSE, BUT--

--OLIVIA, YOU NEED TO TALK TO YOUR DAUGHTER...
...TO HELP HER GET HER HEAD ON STRAIGHT. SHE'S HURTING.
I WARNED HER ABOUT GETTING CLOSE. THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO MAKE IT BETTER.
RIGHT NOW, SURVIVING THIS MESS IS MY ONLY CONCERN.
IT HAS TO BE.
ARE YOU OK, COLA?
I DON'T KNOW...
I WANT TO BELIEVE TUG.
MY MOM--


THE COMMANDER WORKS IN ABSOLUTES, COLA.
SHE HAS TO.
THE DAWN IS HER NORTH.

YOU AND ME...AND NOW TUG.
WE FLY ON THE WINDS OF UNCERTAINTY OUT THERE.
ONE SLIGHT GUST CAN END US.
BUT THAT SAME GUST CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REACHING OUR DESTINATION AND FALLING JUST SHORT.

WHAT DOES THAT ALL MEAN, SCRAM?
I'M TELLING YOU TO TALK TO YOUR MOM.
TELL HER YOU BELIEVE IN HIM.
SHE NEEDS YOU AS MUCH AS YOU NEED HER.

MOM... YOU CAN'T KILL HIM.
I TRUST TUG'S TELLING US THE TRUTH. HE MADE A MISTAKE.
COLA, HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GO ON GUT.
I'M TRYING NOT TO.
I'M GOING ON WHAT I KNOW ABOUT HIM.
TUG WAS JUST DOING WHAT HE THOUGHT HIS FAMILY NEEDED. NO DIFFERENT FROM OURS.
BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE PEOPLE LIKE US.
NOW HE DOES.
HE WANTS TO MAKE UP FOR IT.
YOU CARE FOR HIM?
I TOLD YOU NOT TO DO THAT, COLA.
IT CLOUDS THINGS.
MAYBE.
BUT I BELIEVE HE DIDN'T KNOW BETTER.
HE HAS A CHOICE NOW.
HE'LL CHOOSE US.
OH MY GOD, MOM...
IS THAT--
GET TO YOUR JET, COLA.

"EVERYONE, THIS IS YOUR COMMANDER."
"PREPARE FOR AN ASSAULT."
THEY'VE FOUND US, HAVEN'T THEY?
WHAT WAS THAT FOR?
THE JUDGE IS HERE.
I'M GOING TO NEED MY GUN.
OF COURSE. UNTIL THE END.
LET'S HOPE IT DOESN'T COME TO THAT.
YOU'VE GOT ONE MINUTE TO SUIT UP.

"I'LL SEE YOU ON THE FLIGHT DECK."
DAD? DOES MOM KNOW YOU'RE GOING UP?
SHE'LL KNOW WHEN I'M AIRBORNE.
SHE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN ME, DAD.
SHE DOESN'T BELIEVE YOU CAN WORK WITH HER.
SHE CAN'T CONTROL YOU OUT THERE.
TRUTH BE TOLD, NO ONE CAN.
BUT YOU NEED EACH OTHER. ESPECIALLY NOW.
YOU NEVER TOLD ME THAT BEFORE.
I DIDN'T REALIZE IT EITHER.
I'M JUST A DUMB OLD PILOT, COLA. I'M DOING MY BEST.
AND, EVEN WITH THE JOB TUG DID ON MY OLD BABY HERE, I STILL NEED HELP CLOSING THE COCKPIT DOOR.
SEE YOU OUT THERE, DAD.

I'M READY TO DEFEND THE DAWN.
NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.
OUR HOME NEEDS US. WRECK HAVOC UP THERE.
NOT THIS TIME, CRITTER.
SNORT
DON'T YOU SNORT AT ME.
YOU STAY ON THE DECK.
KEEP THE KIDS AND LACE SAFE.
--RRTT
GOOD BOY.

I AM SORRY.
I BELIEVE YOU.

END CHAPTER FOUR

D U K E

During the making of this issue, my beloved model for Critter passed away. Five years ago, my wife and I adopted him from a shelter because he was nine, and had little chance of ever finding a home. Shortly after bringing him into our fold, he posed for this wonderful shot of Critter.

Duke was the gentlest creature I have ever met, great or small. He was truly wonderful, I love him, and I will miss him horribly. He was a good boy.

-Zach Howard

Pin-up by Vic Malhotra

K6